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ABSTRACT

Junior-high-school students need instruction in utilizing the various reading study skills as a means of better understanding content and of becoming more independent learners of subject matter. Teachers in the content areas, by using texts and subject-related materials, are in the best position to teach these skills. Although each subject has its own study skills, there are six basic study skills that are most generally useful. First, instruction in ways of locating and using sources of information should be given. Second, students should learn flexibility in reading by developing the skills of skimming and scanning. A third important study skill is the ability to select and evaluate ideas, which consists largely of identifying significant ideas and relevant details. Related to this skill is the ability to organize ideas by determining relationships among them. Outlining, notetaking, and summarizing are helpful ways of organizing ideas. A fifth skill that is of benefit to junior-high students is the ability to follow directions, beginning with very simple procedures and progressing to the complex. Finally, skill in using graphic and tabular aids can help in synthesizing facts and details into usable patterns. References are included. (VJ)

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Developing Reading Study Skills in the Content Areas

Perhaps the most prevalent lack of proficiency in reading is in study skills. One of the major concerns of educators at the junior high school level should be that of overcoming this deficiency. As students progress to more advanced levels of learning, well-developed study skills become more and more essential. Textbook reading demands a variety of skills, and instruction to develop these skills must be provided whenever is is needed by students.

The subject matter teacher is concerned primarily with the content of the materials being read by students, is responsible for assisting students to develop the concepts and skills related to the subject, and

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is responsible for helping students develop the skills to gain knowledge independently. However, the subject matter teacher must be concerned with another important facet of the students' learning, that is the reading study skills. Study skills are most efficiently learned within the context in which they are to be used. Such skills should not be taught in isolation. Instead, the text and materials of the content area should be used as a vehicle for the development of these skills. Improving the students' comprehension is greatly dependent upon what a teacher does to improve the student's comprehension before the reading takes place. Thus an effective way of teaching subject matter is achieved by using reading study skills.

Each curriculum area has unique goals of instruction in making use of various study skills. For the purpose of this paper, these many skills as needed by students are grouped into the following six classifications: 1) locating of information, 2) flexibility of reading purposes, 3) selecting and evaluating ideas, 4) organizing ideas, 5) following directions, and 6) using visual aids.

Locating of Information

Junior high school students no longer use a single textbook as their source of informaton when studying a subject. Instead, they find it necessary to refer to other texts, reference books, encyclopedias, almanacs, atlases, newspapers, pamphlets, and similar publications. The use students make of these kinds of materials should be determined by the purpose of their particular assignments. The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature should also become a familiar source to junior

high students. Therefore, instruction in ways of locating and using sources of information should be considered as essential as the teaching of subject matter concepts from textbooks.

A student must develop the ability to use a text for independent study. To do this involves knowing how and when to use the table of contents, chapter titles, headings, summaries, footnotes, index, glossary, and appendix of a text or similar materials. Knowing how to use a dictionary, a card catalog, and a book classification system, such as the Dewey Decimal, are important aids to independent study. Technological aids, such as filmstrips, reading laboratories, records, tape recordings, dial access system, television, and other self-teaching materials should be provided and skill developed in their use to facilitate independent inquiry and research by the student.

Flexibility of Reading

An efficient reader does not read all printed material at a fixed speed. A flexible reader knows what he wants from the printed materials and adjusts his speed to the kind of material being read and to the purpose for which the reading is being done. When an efficient reader reduces his speed, he does so for a purpose. The material and his purpose require him to think more carefully and reflectively than he otherwise would. His concern becomes the rate of comprehending rather than the rate of reading the printed material.

Emphasis on speeding up reading does not increase comprehension. Further, the increase in rate in one type of reading situation is not likely to transfer to any great extent to other types of reading situations. Therefore, the increase in the rate of reading social studies,

for example, does not transfer automatically to reading a science text or other subject texts. To gain flexibility in rate of reading the reader must learn to select an appropriate speed for a particular situation and then practice reading at that rate with understanding. This technique requires systematic teacher guidance in various subjects.

A disabled reader should not receive instruction to increase the rate of his reading until the basic reading difficulties have been corrected. If the number of words a student can recognize is limited, his rate of reading and comprehending will be restricted. An adequate sight vocabulary is an essential factor for increasing the rate of reading. The greater the capacity of the reader to grasp verbal concepts and the meanings of words in sentences, the greater is the probability of his increasing his speed and comprehension.

Skimming is considered as a form of rapid reading by which the reader acquires specific kinds of information. There should be a purpose in using the skill of skimming. This skill involves the reader's ability to select relevant ideas and to skip irrelevant ideas according to the purpose for which he is skimming the material. The greater the reader's background of understanding of the concepts contained in the material, the greater his facility in using the process. Short and simple material, should be used when first developing this skill. Longer and more difficult selections can be used as progress is made by the reader.

In scanning, a reader rapidly examines the printed page by letting his eyes scan the page with the purpose of finding an answer to a specific question, a specific date, or to locate a name or quotation. Scanning is not accelerated reading, but a continual looking then reading, then looking again until the desired information is located. Both skimming and

scanning are useful skills and should receive greater teaching emphasis by teachers in all content areas.

Selecting and Evaluating Ideas

Another reading study skill is the selecting and evaluating of ideas. Selection consists largely of identifying significant ideas and relevant details in paragraphs and in larger units of information. A student's reading is ineffectual if he cannot select the main points and supporting details contained in textbooks and subject-related materials. The purpose in such selection is to determine the essential meaning of the material.

Determination of the main idea is essential if a reader is to interpret and understand what is written. This achievement is based on the reader's accurate comprehension of the word, phrase, sentence, and longer selections. Those who do not ascertain the main idea cannot identify the theme or general notion of the material, cannot understand implied meanings and have difficulty in summarizing what has been read.

The first step for a student in selecting and evaluating the main thought of a sentence is locating the key words. Then the topic sentence in a paragraph is to be located. The third step is to determine the basic idea in several paragraphs. It is important, however, that the student read the whole article when selecting and evaluating ideas.

A student's ability to paraphrase an author's main thought is an effective criterion by which it can be determined whether or not the student is able to select major ideas. Paraphrasing demands an accurate restatement of what an author has written and an understanding of the parts of a passage which are related to the ideas written by the author. To achieve an understanding of what one reads necessitates that the reader grasp the meaning of ideas as he reads.

Proficiency in selecting relevant details is essential for a student to obtain greater understanding of content material. As a student reads he should learn to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant detail. It becomes necessary for the student to relate these ideas to each other and to the main idea of the paragraph and the entire selection.

After mastering the selection of main ideas and relevant details, a student should learn to perceive relationships among sentences and ideas, make inferences in classifying ideas, determine cause and effect, make comparisons, make generalizations, evaluate and make judgments. To engage in a form of critical reading implies a higher level of thinking. Obstacles to critical reading form when a student has the opinion that anything in print is true or if they blindly accept the writing of an author without evaluation. The facets of critical reading are affected by a reader's experiential background and knowledge. The lack of experiential background and knowledge can be great barriers to critical reading, and they must be overcome if a student is to understand and evaluate the material being learned.

Organizing Ideas

A fourth classification of the reading study skills is the organizing of what has been read. The selection and evaluation of main ideas and relevant detail are essential to these study skills. In addition, the reader must be able to determine the relationship among the ideas and know how to make these relationships clear to others. Organizing ideas are accomplished by placing thoughts in relationship to each other in an orderly and systematic form. This skill is different from

that of reading to comprehend the relationship of ideas. Organizing ideas consists of arranging in an organized system the concepts gained from reading one or several sources. This skill also includes organizing ideas in levels of importance. Distinguishing these relationships enable a student to outline main and subordinate ideas in a logical order.

Organizing what has been read is essential to learning and remembering what has been read. The reader can use different approaches to achieve this skill. It can be accomplished by previewing, notetaking, outlining and summarizing. An efficient student will learn to use all of these skills and to select the approach that will assist him to perceive better the relationships among the ideas found in his study of content material.

Previewing what is to be read is an important initial step in reading content material. The reader's rate of reading comprehension and retention of the material is increased when this process is used. Previewing should be taught as a preliminary step to study in all content fields. An efficient reader previews subject matter material to determine the available information, how it is organized, whether the selection is significant to the reading purpose, and what principle ideas are presented. Practice in learning this skill is best achieved in using textbooks, references and resource materials. Students need to recognize that previewing subject matter material is a way of becoming acquainted with the text to be read and is different from the actual study of the content.

A student should learn that if notetaking is to serve as an aid to learning, he must focus on the main idea and relevant details of what is being listened to or read, and then organize these ideas into a written pattern. The outline is usually recommended as a consistent format for recording information. Charts, diagrams and illustrations should be considered a part of an outline because these aids frequently show the organization of an entire discussion. A student should revise his notes soon after he has written them to help increase his retention of pertinent ideas.

Outlining is closely related to summarizing and is a way of organizing information. When a student develops an outline he should identify the major idea and show the relation of relevant details to the main thought in a logical, sequential order. It is necessary for a student to understand the organization of material being read to enable him to place ideas into an outline form. He must select the essential ideas from the non-essential ideas and organize these thoughts into an outline. Indentation in the outline give clues to the organization of major and supporting ideas.

Summaries include the main idea and essential facts in capsule form. This skill is important in helping a student remember what he has read. It also is important when a student has been reading various sources of materials. When reading literature and social studies being able to summarize is particularly beneficial. Summarizing ideas in biology, physics, chemistry and similar sciences can involve lengthy listing of of facts. Using this skill in these science areas may not be as useful to

the reader as summarizing ideas in literature and social studies. When a student is preparing for a discussion, a review, or a test the summarizing of ideas is helpful.

Following Directions

Directions for completing assignments become more prevalent and complex as students progress through the school program. Many students fail to fulfill assignments because they do not read directions or follow them accurately. Therefore, students should have experiences in following both oral and written directions. Students have the opportunity to learn how to follow directions when they demonstrate the use of an object, perform an experiment, draw charts, classify like and unlike substances, develop a technique for interviewing, make maps and keep records.

Learning to follow directions should begin with very simple procedures and progress to something that is more complex. It is often suggested that students be taught to follow directions by beginning with one-step directions and proceed to two-step directions. Then students may be introduced to three or more simple steps and finally they should be introduced to directions for which a number of steps are not stated explicitly.

Reading to follow directions necessitates placing details in sequential order. Before students place details in sequence, they should understand all of the requirements of a task prior to beginning it. If each step is considered carefully before following it, students will encounter more success in their preparation of assignments and their performance on examinations, in demonstrating experiments, etc. A teacher

can help students learn this reading study skill by selecting and formulating needed directions from the content of subject matter. Checking the end product is an effective way for students to determine if directions have been read and followed sequentially.

Using Visual Aids

The use of graphic and tabular aids is the sixth and last study skill to be presented. In the content areas, graphic aids such as maps, charts, graphs, tables, diagrams, pictures, and cartoons aid the interpretation and understanding of reading materials. The use of these aids can help in synthesizing facts and details into usable patterns of knowledge for students. Graphic aids can contribute toward helping students to apply the information gained in reading and enhance their achievement in a subject.

Instruction in reading and interpreting graphic materials is best achieved when such instruction is an outgrowth of regular reading activity in the content areas. To read and interpret graphic and tabular aids requires the ability to understand what is stated directly and to be able to understand what is implied in a text. One of the best ways to teach these reading study skills is to have the students construct tables, graphs, diagrams, and cartoons of their own on the basis of facts that they have collected in their study of a particular topic. Properly used, these aids provide a major means of supplementing the experiences gained through reading.

The teacher must begin with easy, concrete experiences, and then continue to more difficult, abstract learnings when visual aids are used

as supplements for helping students learn subject matter. Teachers must also teach students how to use the symbols and abstract representation which depict features recorded on graphic and tabular aids, particularly maps. Furthermore, when students interpret graphic and tabular aids they become involved in their study of subject matter and they learn to perceive relationships of ideas.

Visual aids which appear in reading material are to be utilized as tools for greater understanding of the context. As the vocabulary and concept load increases in complexity, the need for guidance in reading the associated aids also increases. Thus, visual aids serve as tools in teaching critical thinking skills.

Summary

In summary, there is a definite need for helping junior high school students utilize the various reading study skills as a means of better understanding the different content areas and in becoming more independent learners of subject matter. The teachers of the content areas, by using the text and subject-related materials, are in the best position to teach these functional skills which can contribute to the success of students in the content areas.

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